

Pioneer Printing *in* North Carolina

By DOUGLAS C. MCMURTRIE, *Director of Typography, Ludlow Typograph Co.*

THE laws of North Carolina were revised, but not printed, in 1715, and in 1736 Governor Johnston considered the condition of the laws in an address to the Assembly: "Upon the strictest inquiry I can't find that there is one complete copy of them in any one place, neither have I yet seen two copies of them that perfectly agree . . . most of them either appear under ridiculous titles, are full of contradictions, or their language and style is childish, ridiculous and against the common rules of grammar. As the happiness of every private man depends upon the law, I think that it is a grievance which can never too soon be redressed."

Shameful Condition of Laws

No action was taken on the governor's protest, and in 1739 he appointed a committee on revision, which failed to act. In 1740 and 1744 Johnston spoke of the "shameful condition" of the laws, but no steps were taken to correct the matter. In 1746 a committee of four was appointed "to revise and print the several acts of Assembly in force in this province." An allowance of £60 proclamation money was made the committee, to be paid from the duty on wine, rum and distilled liquors and rice, for their trouble

PASTORAL LETTER,

FROM THE

SYNOD OF THE CAROLINAS,

70 418

CHURCHES UNDER THEIR CARE.

PAYETTEVILLE :

PRINTED BY SIBLEY AND HOWARD.

H. E. C. C. X. C.

TWENTY POUNDS
REWARD.

LOST on the 17th of October, by the subscriber, on the road between *Newbern* and *Curtis's* ferry, a large black leather pocket-book, containing the following certificates, viz. one for three hundred and sixty six pounds thirteen shillings and seven pence specie, issued by Willie Jones and Henry Montfort, Esq's, in the name of Thomas Allen, Lieut. deceased; two for about three hundred and thirty or forty pounds specie, issued by do. and in the name of Lieut. Walter Allen; three or four for ten pounds four shillings each, issued by Coor and Hawks, in whose names not remembered; and two, for seven thousand five hundred paper dollars each, one of them by R. Cogdell, the other by Robert Lanier; and about forty shillings in paper money; and some papers of but little consequence. Whoever delivers the above articles to the subscriber shall receive the above reward, or in proportion for any part thereof.

All Treasurers, Sheriffs, tax-gatherers and entry-takers are requested to take notice if such certificates are offered, and stop them as the property of the subscriber.

All Treasurers, Sheriffs, tax-gatherers and entry-takers are requested to take notice if such certificates are offered, and stop them as the property of the subscriber.

WALTER ALLEN.

Craven Co. Swifts-creek, Decemb. 10th, 1783.

NEWBURN, Printed by R. KEITH, of whom may be had the ALMANACK for the Year of our Lord 1744.

and £100 was allowed for printing, furnishing and delivering the books.

The revision of the laws was completed in 1749, and the revision was declared to be in force that year. To provide for the printing of the laws, the April session of the Assembly of 1749 passed an act under which James Davis, printer, was encouraged to remove to North Carolina. He was to be provided a salary of £160 proclamation money to "Begin and commence from such time as the said James Davis shall have set up his press at New Bern . . . and be ready to proceed on his business of printing; and shall continue for the space of five years, provided the said James Davis shall so long live and perform the said services." He was required to publish the public documents of the governor and the legislature and to maintain his residence in Newbern. His salary was to be provided by a levy of four pence on "every taxable person." The exclusive right of selling the laws was granted to him for five years and the charges were not to exceed twenty shillings a volume.

Davis Comes to North Carolina

Davis agreed to the provisions made by the North Carolina assembly and came to that colony, October 21, 1721, at the age of twenty-eight, probably from Virginia, where he was born. Nothing is definitely known of his antecedents, although it has been supposed that he was associated with William Parks at the Williamsburg, Virginia, press Davis offi-

cially began his work in North Carolina in the last week of June, 1749. His first job was probably the printing of colonial money to relieve the pressing demand for specie, and by October 17, 1749, it was officially noted that Davis had printed £21350 in public bills of credit.

First Publication in 1749

The first North Carolina book or pamphlet imprint may have been the Journals of the House of Burgesses for 1749, presumed to have been printed by Davis at Newbern in that year. The evidence that Davis printed the journals in 1749 and for the two years following is based on the rather slender evidence of an entry in the Journals of the Board of Trade, of England, for November 22, 1752, in which it is noted that the Secretary had received from North Carolina "Printed Journals of that House in 1749, 1750, 1751."

The first book printed by Davis of which a copy is known today was the revision of the laws, edited by Samuel Swann, to print which Davis had been brought to North Carolina. The revision was entitled *A Collection of All the Public Acts of Assembly of The Province of North Carolina: now in Force and Use*

A Message from His Excellency *ARTHUR DOBBS*, Esq; Captain-General, and Governor in Chief, in and over his Majesty's Province of *North-Carolina*;

To the GENERAL ASSEMBLY, held at New York, the Twelfth
Day of December, 1796.

Continued of the Meeting of Council, Mr. Spalding, and Continuation of the Meeting.

HAVE I GONE in my Speech to you at your Meeting, told you that I should, in a more ample Manner, lay before you the Grand Plan of *Phre*, to train down every Art of the British Customs on this Continent? I have the great Honour of laying them twice and enlarging, I believe before you that you may be the first here that grant a reasonable and sometimes supply and entering into a Plan of Union with all the British Customs, for our mutual better Defence.

[illegible][illegible]

and was published with the imprint: "Newbern: Printed by James Davis, M,DCC,LII." In 1752 another edition of the laws was issued, with a few changes and additions.

It has been supposed that the first North Carolina newspaper, the *North-Carolina Gazette* established by James Davis at Newbern, was begun in 1755, but the recent discovery of earlier copies of the *Gazette*, hidden for over a century in the improvised binding of some early county records, now shows that Davis began his paper about July, 1751. Davis continued the *North-Carolina Gazette* until 1759 or a little later, when it was suspended, and in 1764 he established a sequel to it, the *North Carolina Magazine*, which lasted until about 1768. In 1768 Davis returned to the title of *North-Carolina Gazette* and continued to publish it until war conditions forced its cessation in the fall of 1778. Davis was assisted in business by his son Thomas, and when Thomas Davis was drafted into the army the father found considerable difficulty in continuing the *Gazette*. He wrote the governor on November 2, 1778, that Thomas Davis had been drafted, that he was chief assistant in the printing office, and that without his aid it might be impossible to continue the paper. The last issue located is dated November 30, 1778, and was probably the last published.

Difficulties With Davis

James Davis served as public printer to North Carolina from 1749 until his retirement about 1782, but his long years of service were not entirely peaceful ones. As early as 1752 he was reprimanded and actually fined by the Assembly for neglect of his duty in handling the public work, and on other occasions he clashed with the Assembly. His original five-year contract was renewed in 1754, 1757, and 1760, but in 1762 there was an attempt to have Alexander Purdie, who three years later became publisher of the *Williamsburg Virginia Gazette*, appointed printer for North Carolina. This attempt failed, but Davis was granted only a temporary continuance of his contract, and two years later a more serious effort was made to find a successor to Davis. The office of public printer was made a point of issue between the governor and council on one side and the lower house on the other. Governor Dobbs wrote the Assembly on March 5, 1764, "I can never approve of the late printer appointed by the Assembly, upon account of his negligence . . . I must therefore recommend it to the Assembly to . . . encourage a printer to reside where he can attend the government and Assembly and do his duty to the public, and not barely consider his own profit and conveniency." The lower house appointed a committee to find a public

printer willing to accept a salary of £200 a year, and the governor, taking matters into his own hands, announced the appointment of Andrew Steuart, of Philadelphia, as His Majesty's Printer. The lower house responded with an angry resolution that "the appointment of a Printer under the sounding Appellation of His Majesty's Printer . . . is of an unusual nature, truly unknown either to our Laws or Constitution, and yet as it appears to us a most extensive stretch of Power, and may in its tendency establish a New Office, to exact new Fees . . . We the Assembly of this Province therefore to guard the Liberties of the Subject and our indubitable Rights Do Resolve that

we know no such Office as his Majesty's Printer of this Province and of no Duties, Fees or Emoluments annexed or incident to such Office and that the said appointment is of a new and unusual nature unknown to our Laws, and it a violent stretch of Power." Two days later the governor officially appointed Steuart public printer, and the house promptly nullified the appointment by naming James Davis as printer; voting Steuart £100 for his "Voyage, Trouble and Expence," and making sure that he collected no further funds by enacting a new law decreeing that the treasurer should pay out no money "by order of the governor and

A
C O L L E C T I O N
O F
All the P U B L I C
A C T S O F A S S E M B L Y,
O F
The P R O V I N C E o f
N O R T H - C A R O L I N A:
Now in F O R C E and U S E.

Together with the T I T L E S of all such L A W S as are Obsolete, Expir'd, or Repeal'd.

And also, an exact T A B L E of the Titles of the A C T S in Force.

REVISED by Commissioners appointed by an Act of the GENERAL ASSEMBLY of the said Province, for that Purpose; and Examined with the Records, and Confirmed in full Assembly.



NEW BERN: Printed by JAMES DAVIS, M,DCC,LII.

council without the concurrence or direction of this House."

More Trouble With Davis

After this tempest in a teapot, which succeeded in bringing a second printer to the colony but failed to oust Davis from his official position, the pioneer printer was re-elected public printer in 1766, 1770 and 1774. At the April session of 1777 it was decided to replace Davis with John Pinkney, bankrupt printer of the Williamsburg, Virginia Gazette. The location of the public printing office was shifted from Newbern to Halifax at this time, but the attempt to replace Davis was not successful. A contemporary account of September 15, 1777, gives the story: "The Assembly thought proper to remove an old servant (the printer) for neglect of duty, and appoint one who resided in Virginia who, after long delay, removed to Halifax about five or six weeks ago, where he died." Meanwhile Davis, even though he was not officially public printer, published the session laws for that year just as he had for many years before. He continued to do the public work until 1781, and when he announced his intention of retiring from business the Assembly on February 9, 1781, requested him "to continue in the business of public printer." He did retire, however, and was succeeded by his son Thomas Davis.

James Davis Succeeds Father

Besides his official publications and his newspapers, James Davis printed various other works. In 1753 he published Clement Hall's *A Collection of many Christian Experiences*, with the imprint: "Newbern: Printed by James Davis, M,DCC,LII." He printed sermons in 1756, 1761, and 1768; and in 1778 Thomas Ruddiman's *The Rudiments of the Latin Tongue*, Dyche's spelling book, and an edition of the treaty so recently concluded between France and the United States.

Thomas Davis, as has been noted, assisted his father in publishing the Newbern *North-Carolina Gazette* until he was drafted into the patriot army in the fall of 1778. He returned from service some time before 1782, and in that year he succeeded his father as public printer, moving the Davis printing office from Newbern to Halifax, which he thus made the third printing point in that state. He issued the public documents there for two years, and it is probable that he also issued a paper at Halifax, beginning early in 1784. Thomas Davis lost the public printing contract in 1785, and his father died in that year, leaving the printing equipment to him. In 1786 Thomas Davis again appeared in connection with the business of printing, this

time as publisher of the *Hillsborough Recorder*, which introduced the press at Hillsborough, fourth printing point in North Carolina. Robert Ferguson, later to become George Roulstone's partner in introducing the press to Tennessee, was the printer of the *Hillsborough Recorder*. Thomas Davis did not live much longer and is believed to have died about 1790.

Steuart Comes to North Carolina

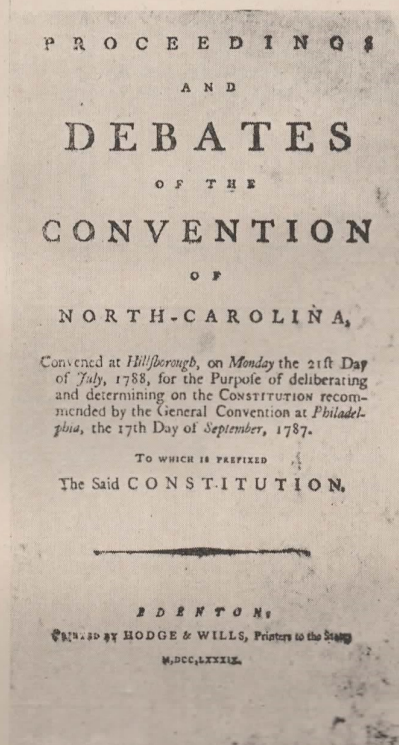
Andrew Steuart came to the United States from Belfast, Ireland, where he had learned his trade with James Magee. He settled in Philadelphia, and in 1758 opened a book store and printing shop there, where he published pamphlets, ballad broadsides, and other small jobs. In 1761 he went to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where he established another book store. During this time he became notorious by printing a well known poem without permission of the author. In 1764, at the invitation of Governor Dobbs, Steuart came to Wilmington, the newly chosen capitol of North Carolina, and in spite of the objections raised to him and to the title conferred on him it seems likely that he did print some documents over his imprint as "Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty."

Steuart was the second printer in North Carolina, and he introduced printing at Wilmington, second printing point in the state. His official contract began June 24, 1764, and in October, 1764, Steuart began the *Wilmington North-Carolina Gazette*, which was discontinued

in 1766 for lack of support. He printed the session laws for 1764, and the next year issued Maurice Moore's *Justice and Policy of Taxing The American Colonies, In Great-Britain Considered*, which had the imprint: "Wilmington, (North-Carolina) Printed by Andrew Steuart, and sold at his Office, near the Exchange, M,DCC,LXV."

With the failure of his paper, Steuart seems to have retired altogether from the printing business, and in 1767 the town of Wilmington was looking about for another printer. Isaiah Thomas, later to become a leading New England printer and historian of American printing, heard of the opportunity for one of his craft in Wilmington. Thomas was then in Boston working for Zechariah Fowle, but he went to Newport, Rhode Island, for the purpose of interviewing Martin Howard, chief justice of North Carolina who was then at that place. Howard encouraged him in the idea of going to North Carolina, and Thomas proceeded to Wilmington by boat. There he found that Steuart "had a press with two or three very small founts of letters for sale," but that the printer himself "was without business, having given great offence to the governor and the principal gentlemen at Cape Fear. For this reason he was desirous to sell the material he had then in that place, and to return to Philadelphia, where he had another small printing establishment." Thomas was urged by several citizens of Wilmington to purchase Steuart's equipment and begin printing there. He began negotiations with Steuart, who took advantage of the fact that there was no other printing equipment available and placed an exorbitant price on his press and types. One difficulty after another was placed in the way of the sale by the avaricious Steuart, until at last Thomas became discouraged with the prospects offered in North Carolina and refused to make purchase at any price. He left Wilmington for Charleston, South Carolina, and Steuart continued to live at Wilmington until 1769, when he was drowned bathing at Cape Fear.

Steuart's printing equipment, idle now for two years, was purchased after his death by Adam Boyd, who was born in Pennsylvania in 1738 and came to North Carolina about 1764. He was the son of a Presbyterian minister and knew nothing of the practical side of printing. Nevertheless, he undertook the establishment at Wilmington on October 13, 1769, of the *Cape-Fear Mercury*, second newspaper published there. He had only one assistant to manage the press and set the type, and in looking about for a second practical printer he offered a position to Isaiah Thomas, who refused to consider anything less than a partnership.



A
COMPLETE REVISAL
 OF ALL THE
A C T S
 O F
A S S E M B L Y,
 OF THE PROVINCE OF
NORTH-CAROLINA,
 NOW IN FORCE AND USE.

T O G E T H E R
 WITH THE TITLES OF ALL SUCH LAWS AS
 ARE OBSOLETE, EXPIRED, OR REPEALED.

W I T H
 MARGINAL NOTES AND REFERENCES, AND AN
 EXACT TABLE TO THE WHOLE.

N E W B E R N :
 PRINTED BY JAMES DAVIS, PRINTER TO THE HONOURABLE THE HOUSE OF
 ASSEMBLY. MDCCLXXXIII.

In spite of the fact that their publisher admitted the copies of the *Cape-Fear Mercury* were "very incorrect, & contain nothing new," he continued the paper intermittently until 1775, and in January, 1776, Boyd entered the patriot army, serving as chaplain. His paper had been supported by the Wilmington Committee of Safety in 1775, and was revived during that year at the committee's request, after one of its periods of suspension. After the war Boyd abandoned the printing business definitely,

and in 1787 he was ordained to the Episcopal ministry. He served a church in Augusta, Georgia, from 1790 to 1799, leaving there in 1800 for Tennessee and Mississippi, where he died some time after 1802.

After the suspension of James Davis' *North-Carolina Gazette* in 1778 there was no paper at Newbern until 1783, when Robert Keith, using the press and types of Davis, established a paper with the old title of *North-Carolina Gazette*. Keith had recently come to North Caro-

lina from Philadelphia, and he had in 1782 done some work in Charleston, South Carolina, in partnership with John Mc'Iver, Junior.

Martin Replaces Keith

Within a few years Keith was replaced by Francis X. Martin, who probably worked in his office as early as 1783. Martin was a young Frenchman with slight typographic experience who became an expert printer under the direction of Keith, and some time before 1787 Martin succeeded Keith in the publication of the *North-Carolina Gazette*, which he continued until 1797. He published various legal works before he discontinued his press in 1797. Later he went to Louisiana, became chief justice of that state, and died in 1846 possessed of a large fortune.

Another printing office had been opened at Newbern in 1785 when Abraham Hodge and his partner Blanchard established the *State Gazette of North-Carolina*. In 1786 Hodge, with another partner by the name of Arnett, produced *The Laws of the State of North-Carolina, Passed at Newbern, December, 1785*, "Newbern: Printed by Arnett & Hodge, Printers to the State. MDCCLXXXVI." In 1788, Blanchard was replaced by Henry Wills in the publication of the paper, and in the summer of 1788 Hodge and Wills at the suggestion of James Iredell moved the *State Gazette* to Edenton, where they were the second printers. Both Blanchard and Wills were associated with Hodge in doing the public printing. Hodge and Wills remained at Edenton until 1793, establishing a new paper at Halifax, the *North-Carolina Journal*, in the summer of 1792, in an attempt to keep the public printing contract. The partners separated in 1793 as far as the publication of their papers at Halifax and Edenton was concerned, but their names continued to appear together on the public documents printed at the Halifax office until 1795. Wills kept the Edenton *State Gazette* and published it alone until 1797, when he was succeeded by his brother-in-law James Wills. Hodge retained the Halifax *North-Carolina Journal*, publishing it alone from 1793 until 1805. In 1799 he pursued the will-o-the-wisp of the public printing to Raleigh, then newly become the capitol, and established the *North-Carolina Minerva* in partnership with his nephew, William Boylan. They continued this paper until 1803. Boylan had from 1796 to 1799 published the *North-Carolina Minerva* at Fayetteville in partnership with Hodge.